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THE MASS

BY THE
REV. A. SICARD

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE FRENCH

BY
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PREFACE

These simple talks on the Mass were originally delivered to my parishioners. The respectful attention with which they were received and the desire of the faithful to possess the text, prompted their publication.

The author wishes to say that he does not pretend to write a scientific treatise, though he has neglected no source of information. His sole desire, first and last, is to reach the mind and the heart of his readers.

The Mass! What a sublime subject, yet how bewildering, too, because of its very sublimity! To celebrate Mass, to assist at Mass, is to come into immediate contact with Christ and to enter, so to speak, into the Holy of Holies. How, therefore, can we speak of the Mass without running the risk of uttering commonplace platitudes on the divine drama that is being enacted before our eyes?

Nevertheless, let us make an attempt. All have the right to contribute a ray, however faint, to the light which so many writers have endeavored to throw upon this subject. We shall treat in turn of the

meaning and general elements of the mass,—our aim being to inspire the reader with the highest idea of this great act of worship and to aid him in assisting at it with ever increasing devotion.

THE AUTHOR.

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THE MASS

PART I

THE MEANING OF THE MASS

I

*The Mass above all a Sacrifice.—Christ, the
Eternal Mediator between God and Man.—
The Different Parts of the Mass.*

THE fundamental idea of the Mass is that of sacrifice. The Mass centers our attention on the Redeemer. Man is a wounded being, who can only be saved by redemption and ransom. He is also a sinner, and to the sin he inherited from Adam he is ever adding his own actual sins; a flood of iniquity streams through his life.

Facing this flagrant squanderer of grace and daily sinner stands the figure of Christ, ever ready to offer reparation for his faults. Sin is an evil. It defiles the soul and leaves a stain on it—*macula peccati*. Sin is an ugly monster. To sin is to sink to a low level, to fall from order, harmony, duty, to lose comeliness and peace. Sin degrades and disturbs. In the soul which it has

robbed of its crown and beauty, it awakens remorse; which fortunately is not easily silenced. Remorse is as lasting as sin; it pleads guilty and demands atonement, and then leads to peace through pardon.

It is at this point that the Saviour, the One sent by God, intervenes to redeem and raise mankind. To fallen, guilty, remorseful mankind, the Redeemer stretches forth a helping hand, and reveals a heart anxious to atone and forgive. Christ fulfilled this part for the first time on Calvary; but by a divine miracle this act is repeated every day at Mass. Between God, who is law, holiness, and justice, and man, a miserable sinner, who fell first in Eden and who still falls an easy prey to evil, intervenes an Almighty Mediator, who takes it upon Himself to offer expiation,—sin's endless reparation. This is the admirable solution to a problem otherwise insoluble, since we have pitted against each other two extremes; *viz.*, the inexorable demands of a God, who, being holiness itself, can crown only the just, and the weakness of a creature, doomed to evil as it were, because driven by so many passions. St. Paul has vividly outlined the marvelous plan of God, who found a way of reconciling two attributes apparently so opposed to each other, and of redeeming the world through Christ, the victim for the sins of the world. *Deus erat in Christo mundum reconcilians sibi.* The perpetual redemption of mankind, once real-

ized on Calvary through the intermediary of Jesus Christ, is renewed every day at Mass. This is the supreme gift of the Mass. Nothing will ever uproot from the mind and heart of man the conviction that there are redeeming sacrifices; that the help of others is beneficial to us; that when the just suffer there arise from the expiation made by Christ refreshment, mercy, and pardon for sinners.

The sacrifice that comprises the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion, is known in history as the Mass of the Faithful. It was preceded by the Mass of the Catechumens, which consisted of those parts of the Mass from the Introit to the Offertory, exclusively. In the first century new converts were not allowed to assist farther than this. Previous to the Mass came the offering of the prayers, chants, reading and sermons. All these were finally blended into the Mass of the Catechumens, which contains no essential element of the sacrifice, yet is of great moment.

We shall unite all the considerations we have to offer on the Mass under two headings: (1) the Preparation, from the Introit to the Offertory; (2) the Sacrifice, from the Offertory to the end. From the Introit to the Epistle we have a preparation of the heart; from the Epistle to the Offertory, a preparation of the mind. The Sacrifice proper is divided into three parts: the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion.

The Vestments of the Priest.—The Awe that falls upon Celebrant and Congregation about to meet Christ.

The celebrant is about to perform one of the most sublime acts of his sacred ministry. All important institutions, the army, the courts, colleges, etc., have their particular costumes. The priest wears vestments that clothe him with a sublime dignity and with that character of venerable antiquity which the Church imparts to everything she touches.

The priest puts on the amice, the alb, the cincture, the maniple, the stole, and the chasuble. Almost all of these come down to us from ancient Rome; nevertheless, the Liturgy attaches to each a mystical significance. The amice originally placed on the head and the neck as a protection in battle, is, in St. Paul's words, the "helmet of salvation"; the alb, according to the etymology of the word, symbolizes innocence; the cincture indicates chastity; the maniple represents the weight and acceptance of sorrow; the stole is the emblem of immortality; and the chasuble, which covers all the other

vestments, signifies the cloak of charity that should be wrapped round the minister of God.

The progress of centuries has left its mark on this costume. The Bible says of a minister of the Old Law: "As the morning star shining from the midst of the cloud, as the lily on the bank of the stream, as the aroma of incense in summer, as was Simon, the son of Oziah, in the Temple of God, when he appeared there with his garments of glory and the insignia of his dignity." We need not discourse in such lyric terms; but we can frankly assert that the priestly robes of the Christian Church yield in nothing to those of the Old Testament. The alb and the chasuble have become works of art; however they cannot and should not be considered apart from their meaning as emblems of high moral significance; they suggest indeed a lesson, an ideal of sanctification.

The purification of the soul must be the first care of the faithful as well as of the priest at the beginning of the Mass. He has left his house, he has for a time set aside his daily worries and steps into the church, which is the sanctuary of God. Here he is to meet a great Personage, clad with might and resplendent with holiness. The deportment of the attendants, recollected and silent, warns him that the ceremony is nothing less than divine and that the Host on this occasion is descended from Heaven. Voices seem to issue from all parts of the temple,

from the choir, the nave, the arches, and the walls themselves, and whisper into his ears: *Sanctus, Sanctus*, Holy is this place! Holy is the Lord! God is here, and this God is Jesus Christ, the God of the Gospel, the God of the Passion, the God of the Last Supper.

We cannot possibly attend a ceremony which unites us so intimately with Christ without coming into contact with Him, without hearing from his lips the *Beati mundo corde* (Blessed are the clean of heart), without rendering ourselves worthy of touching at least the hem of His garment,—if we lack the necessary dispositions to sit at His table. It is most desirable that the faithful should assist at Mass in the state of grace. In the first century, those who were not yet purified by the waters of Baptism, and sinners who were performing public penance, were ushered from the church before the Offertory began. How the moral atmosphere of our lives would be cleansed if all of us went to Mass pure, and returned therefrom still purer!

The Altar.—Its Transformations.—Need of some kind of a Purification.—The Psalm.—The Confiteor.—The Introit.—The Kyrie Eleison.—The Gloria.—The Collect.

The priest now stands at the altar. We cannot think of an altar without thinking of a sacrifice; the two are inseparable. The altar, therefore, was well known before the Christian era. Under the Old Law, the victims offered by Abel, Noë, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon were sacrificed upon an altar. But what of the altar of the New Law? Since the Holy Mass is both a sacrifice,—the Consecration,—and a divine banquet,—the Communion,—the altar must answer this twofold purpose. This is why it is shaped in the form of a table and a tomb.

The altar has its history. Very simple in the beginning, and mounted upon primitive props, it has been embellished and transformed in the course of ages. Stone, gold, silver, and copper were used besides wood, or substituted for it, after the triumph of the Church under Constantine. Later on, with the appearance of the Roman and Gothic styles, artists began to work on the pilasters. The reredos

is a twelfth century innovation which spread through every land in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In Flanders, and still more in Spain, it prompted those sumptuous creations, so often described in books on art, which spread out in fantastic arabesques and sometimes even rose to the very arch of the sacred edifice.

The altar, as we know it to-day, is composed of the steps, the columns, the reredos, the tabernacle, and the expository. It must be blessed, or rather consecrated, and in this ceremony the Church proceeds with particular solemnity. Prayers, repeated incensing, unctions with the holy oils, sprinklings, crosses—five in all, traced upon the altar stone,—nothing is spared in the preparation of a suitable background for the great mystery to be accomplished. Once blessed, the altar is embellished by art. It is piously covered with beautiful linen that seems to commemorate the sheet in which the Saviour's body was wrapped after His death.

The priest reaches the altar filled with holy thoughts and with an ardent desire to prepare and purify his soul. After having blessed himself at the foot of the steps, he recites the *Judica me*, a psalm of wonderful inspiration. More appropriate or more inspiring words for beginning the Mass could not easily be found, for, according to the Biblical text, the Psalmist, exiled from Jerusalem among a "godless people," in the land of the Jordan,

near Hermon, is haunted with the memory of the "Holy Mount." "As the thirsty stag craves for the living waters, so my soul thirsts for the living God. . . . Day and night I live only on my tears. . . . I weep as soon as I recall the past events of my life and see myself again advancing with the throng toward the house of God, amidst the joyful cries of a people in festal glee." The exile, bereft of that heavenly happiness, formulates his complaint: "O God, why didst Thou cast me away? Judge me and separate my cause from that of the impious. . . . Thou art my strength. . . . Thy light and Thy truths led me to Thy tabernacle." Confidence very soon takes the place of this plaintive cry. Despondent a moment ago, he now lifts his heart: "Why art thou sorrowful, my soul, and why dost thou disquiet me? . . . Hope in God, for I will give praise to Him. . . . I will go unto the altar of God, to God, who giveth joy to my youth!" With the officiating priest the faithful say in their turn: "I will go unto the altar of God." Their speaker on this occasion is the altar boy, who adds, in his clear young voice: "To God who giveth joy to my youth." He is indeed in the flower of his youth, while many of the congregation are youthful only in spirit. This dialogue between the celebrant and the faithful is a real poem teeming with Biblical imagery. Craving of the soul after God; thirst for Him and His holy days; sense of a loss when away from Him;

indifference with regard to earthly pleasures so natural to all those who have caught a glimpse of the "Holy Mountain"; thrill of the soul under the guidance of "the light and truth," are not these the sentiments that should animate priest and faithful alike when advancing to the altar?

Moses was filled with terror when, ordered to climb Mount Horeb, the "Mount of God," he caught a glimpse of the Deity in the midst of the burning bush. In ascending the steps of the altar, the celebrant is moved by a like feeling. He has placed his confidence in God: "*Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini.*" To ascend the altar, the place where dwells the Divinity, where the heavenly miracle is wrought, where one meets the Lord face to face. What an interview! The priest is overwhelmed by the sense of his unworthiness, at the thought of what he is and what he should be in such a place, when about to perform such a function. What a mission for a sinner, to accomplish a divine work, in which one touches the two summits of the life of Christ,—the Last Supper and Calvary! For such functions angels would not be too pure.

The celebrant remembers how in the Old Law the confession of sins by the High Priest preceded the sacrifice, how at the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His Apostles to purify them, and how their successors may be cleansed by true repentance. Hence he recites the *Confiteor*: he confesses to God,

who alone can forgive; to the blessed Virgin Mary, the refuge of sinners; to St. Michael, the Archangel, who crushed the father of sin; to St. John the Baptist, the great preacher of penance; to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, sinners themselves; to all the Saints who gained entrance to Paradise by repentance and pardon; and "to you, Brethren," who know but too well his shortcomings. His confession is complete in thought, word and deed, and his sincerity is coupled with humility: "Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault."

The faithful also realize the necessity of purification at the beginning of the Mass, since it is, as it were, an ascension of the soul and an aspiration towards heavenly things. They, therefore, recite the *Confiteor* after the priest. As a result, they at once experience a feeling of conversion and reconciliation and a conviction of granted pardon, a sense of a lifted burden pervades the conscience of all: "*Indulgentiam, absolutionem et remissionem.*"

The celebrant now feels that he has drawn nearer to God. Relying on His mercy, he may now ascend the steps of the altar, accompanied in spirit by the faithful. And so he ascends, continuing the while his prayer: "Take away from us our iniquities, we beseech Thee, O Lord, that we may be worthy to enter with pure minds into the Holy of Holies." Having kissed the consecrated stone, wherein are deposited relics of martyrs, he reads the

Introit, a very short selection from a psalm that in bygone days was chanted by the congregation while the priest proceeded to the altar (hence the name *Introitus*, i. e., entry). The *Introit* expresses in a few words—and often with singular accuracy—the spirit of the day.

After the *Introit*, the celebrant deems it necessary to strengthen his confidence. Nine times is repeated alternately by celebrant and server the invocation "*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison*"—Lord have mercy on us, Christ have mercy on us,—which, in its suppliant form, is a cry of humility and abandonment to God. Both expressions are relics of the Greek tongue in the Roman liturgy, for Greek was used in the Roman liturgy up to the middle of the third century, when the language of Cicero and Virgil supplanted that of Homer and Sophocles.

Then the celebrant and the faithful joyously burst forth into the "*Gloria in excelsis*," the hymn of exultation and gratitude to the Lamb, "who taketh away the sins of the world," and an open profession of faith in the Holy Trinity. This was the song of the angels hovering over the crib at Bethlehem. In the *Gloria* of the Mass it is repeated and amplified with jubilant and fervent ejaculations. The "Angel's Hymn" reflects the glowing inspiration of the heroic ages. "O God, we praise Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee. Thou art all might, all glory. Receive

our prayer, Thou who art seated at the right hand of the Father. . . . Thou, who art alone holy, alone Lord, alone All Highest, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God the Father. Amen." The adorer stops, it would seem, from sheer exhaustion. St. Athanasius relates that in the fourth century the women knew this hymn by heart.

The prayer following the *Gloria* is called the *Collect*, for it is recited in the name of all the assembled faithful (*collecti*). It expresses their homage and petitions in conformity with the solemnity of the day. For centuries these prayers were left to the free inspiration of the celebrant. Those that have come down to us have kept their particular form and the stamp of their time, whether they convey to us an echo of the catacombs, or the more ample and more resolute voice of the basilicas, or the sublime harmony of the great cathedrals.

An improvisation is more fervent, but less regular than the written text, and, furthermore, there is danger of its being too vague. As early, therefore, as the fourth century, selections were made among the ancient writings. The ages have lent their treasures to the prayers of the Missal. Generally the *Collect* and the *Postcommunio* condense into a few concise and pregnant words, which have reference to the feast of the day, the happiest expression of the sentiments that God's worship and the sense of our needs can evoke in both priest and faithful.

The Doctrinal Element in the Mass.—Holy Mass the Office of "Light and Truth."—The Genius of St. Paul predominant in the Epistle.—Changes in the Gradual.—Popularity of the Sequence.

The office is progressing. Little by little we enter into the *holy action* and gradually rise to the loftiest heights. Hitherto the preparation was concerned especially with our hearts and consciences; from now on it is addressed mostly to the mind.

The Mass is above all a sacrifice; but it is also a doctrine, a teaching. Christ commands attention and adoration as Our Redeemer, but He speaks to us first as teacher. What else, indeed, is the Epistle, selected from the writings of the Apostles and echoing forth the teachings of the Gospel? And what is the Gospel read every day at Mass and solemnly chanted on Sundays? What is the sermon, less lofty, indeed, than the words of St. Paul, but more universal and more widely used? What the *Credo* repeated by the people, the symbol of our faith? All these are nothing less than the life and substance, ever active and breathing, of the teachings of Christ.

Fortunate, indeed, are we that this teaching is recalled and explained in God's temple and at Holy Mass, *i. e.*, in the most sacred of places, and at an hour when the greatest of mysteries is celebrated. Not inclined, as a rule, to receive mystical impressions, man is naturally more attentive to the sound of the spoken word than to the symbolical language of a ceremony, more ready to give ear to a sermon than to watch the progress of a rite. The Oriental Churches have almost given up the preaching of the word and have sacrificed the teacher for the sacrificer, thus neglecting to cultivate the noblest faculty in man, his mind, and reducing religious worship to minute ceremonies, to formulas and formalistic practices devoid of light and life. The followers of these liturgies are perhaps faithful adorers and earnest devotees, but their devotion is full of routine and soul-less. Blessed be the Catholic Church for having given doctrine a share in the Mass!

From the very beginning of the Office, the Church has placed upon the lips of the priest the words of the Psalm "*Judica me*": "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth; they have conducted me and brought me unto the holy mount and into Thy tabernacles—*lucem tuam et veritatem tuam: . . . ipsa me deduxerunt, . . .*" Light and Truth, therefore, led the priest and the faithful to the church, and light and truth dwell upon the heights, upon the "Holy

Mount," whence they descend upon the altar. From the altar they radiate through the temple and into the soul of the worshippers. Christ is the Word Incarnate, nevertheless He always remains the Word. That is why Holy Mass is an office of light, truth, and doctrine. It may be said in all truth that the faithful know of their religion only that which they have learned at Mass.

Instruction had its place even in the Old Testament. In the services of the synagogue Moses and the Prophets were read. In the New Law the Gospels and Epistles were added to these selections. It was the duty of a cleric, who went by the name of lector, to read to the people the text of the divine word. According to St. Paul and Tertullian, this reading was a sort of conference, in which the audience was allowed to speak and give its interpretation of the passage. The matter, of course, could be taken from a very large number of books, and so in course of time it was deemed necessary to limit it and to select it mainly from certain writings. From the fourth century on, the readings were restricted to the Epistles and the Gospels. Most of the Epistles are selected from the letters of St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James, St. John, St. Jude (hence the name *epistola*: letter); or from the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocalypse, and the Old Testament, especially the Sapiential Books.

The largest and most powerful contribution is

made by St. Paul. For the fiery zeal of a convert, the authoritative tone of an elect, once transported to Heaven and brought face to face with God; the ardor of a proselyte that prompts him to undertake endless journeys over seas and continents; the doctrinal trend of a mind bent on fathoming, as far as human intellect is capable, the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption; the enthusiasm of a disciple ever ready to sing the praises of Christ; the unflinching firmness of a wonderful legislator who settled once for all the greatest problems of morality and religious discipline; for transcendency, fulness and fecundity of human genius St. Paul's Epistles rank second only to the Gospels. He requested the Thessalonians and the Colossians to listen, each and every one of them, to the reading of the letters he was forwarding them, and the Church never tires of hearing his voice.

Between the Epistle and the Gospel are inserted a few chants: the Gradual, the Tract, the Response, and the Alleluia. These are always in agreement with the different periods of the liturgical year. In the first centuries, the joyful accents of the Alleluia, and even the severer tone of the Tract, developed into lengthier chants, which were designated by the name of *Sequence*, *i. e.*, Continuation. Carried away by the fervor of their love, but finding themselves short of words, the singers would improvise on the last syllable modulations supported only by

their breath and called, therefore, by the Greek word "*neums*." These were the inarticulate cries of the jubilant soul, clothing with a sonorous expression the feelings that overwhelmed it. Soon these vocalizations had to be molded into definite form, and the neums were accompanied by words. From this evolution of the neums and the introduction of a text to a melody originally without words came our Sequence.

The Sequence was most welcome. Not later than the tenth century, and all through the Middle Ages, the Sequences multiplied, to such an extent that they figured in the Mass almost every Sunday. We are still fortunate to hear them from time to time. When, before the chanting of the Gospel, the organ's mighty voice suddenly sounds through the church and takes up the melody of the Sequence like a chant of triumph, our attention is at once centered upon the saint whose feast we celebrate. The congregation unites with the choir to alternate with the organ; and the enthusiasm and harmony thus created transport one and all, whilst they impart to the Sequence a most inspiring life. At one time, each province had its own Sequences in honor of its local saints, and these pious melodies delighted the ears and hearts of our ancestors. Among the most famous Sequences in use throughout the entire world we have the *Dies Ira*, with its sombre grandeur that strikes a note of terror in those who listen

to it, and the *Stabat Mater*, which fills the soul with compassion and pity. And who of us has not been carried away by the chant of the *Lauda Sion*, wherein St. Thomas Aquinas gives free rein to his genius and wherein the metrical rhythm re-echoes the triumphal march of the Romans to the Capitol?

The Gospel.—The Sermon.—The Pulpit, a Creation of Christianity.—The Credo.

We have come to the Gospel. The celebrant has bowed low, with joined hands, before the altar, and recited the "*Munda cor meum*," beseeching God, who cleansed the lips of the prophet Isaias with a burning coal, to cleanse his lips and enkindle the flame of love in his heart, that he may worthily proclaim the holy Gospel. At Solemn High Mass a procession is formed. The book of the Gospels is carried with the greatest reverence, the cross and the lighted candles preceding. To the lector or the subdeacon is assigned the reading or singing of the Epistle; the chanting of the Gospel is the privilege of the deacon. No wonder that Pope Anastasius commanded the faithful to stand out of respect during this chant, while they remain seated during the Epistle. In the days of yore the Polish nobility and the knights of military orders drew their swords during the chanting of the Gospel, to show in a striking manner that they were ready to fight and shed their blood in defense of their faith.

Now that the Gospel has been sung, it is time to comment upon it. The celebrant ascends the *ambo*,

situated in the fore-nave (*πρόναος*) (whence the French word, *prône*), or into the pulpit. From both ambo and pulpit orators and doctors have been heard whose eloquence might discourage the preachers of to-day. The homily expected of them was pronounced in bygone days by a Chrysostom and a Gregory. Augustine, before delighting with his own charming talks the fishermen of Hippo and all posterity after them, had himself been captivated by the discourses of Ambrose. These great names are the ornament and pride of our religion, but side by side with great geniuses are workers of less ability, those legions of preachers whose less commanding yet universally recognized voices spread the divine truth throughout the whole world.

Let the priest ascend the ambo or mount into the pulpit, the most humble among the humblest; even though he be not gifted with oratorical powers, he has been entrusted with the word of God. There he stands, clothed with the authority of the Church and fortified with the blessing of God. Let him preach, but let him be simple, practical, penetrating, and, above all, let him *preach the Gospel*. He is legion, and his colleagues by the thousands and tens of thousands address the people throughout the world every Sunday at the same hour; a gigantic network of moral and religious instruction encircles the whole globe, and envelops in its folds all men without distinction.

Pagan antiquity knew nothing equal to this, for it did not seek to proselytize. It lacked apostles. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle never attempted to carry their philosophy beyond the boundaries of greater Athens. Furthermore, they had no gospel. The genius of a Plato or an Aristotle sufficed to create immortal dialogues and treatises that are masterpieces of human reasoning, but it required a God-Man to create the Gospel, to infuse into it so much clearness, doctrine, meekness and mercy, so much charity and love, so much humanity and divinity. This is His book, it is a gift from Heaven to earth, and for this reason we find it in every hand. Every page has been meditated upon, every word has received some commentary, and the light and truth, *lux et veritas*, that have emanated from its leaves for two thousand years have never once waned. Not in vain has the Church drawn from these sources, not in vain have the interpreters of the Gospel and of St. Paul commented upon these pages in every pulpit. By their teaching they have spread the faith.

As a proof of this we have the *Credo* sung immediately after the Gospel on Sundays and the principal holydays. It is a cry of millions of human voices, proclaiming in the face of heaven the homage and allegiance of the earth to God. At times the sound of the organ is hushed and the music ceases to give freer rein to the voice of the faithful. The *Credo* is the *Magna Charta* of the believer. "*Credo*

in unum Deum," I believe in God, one God in three persons, God the Father the Creator, God the Son the Redeemer, God the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier; I believe in the God-Man, in the Word made flesh, in Christ, in His Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, in the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church; I believe in Baptism for the remission of sins, in the resurrection of the dead, in the life of the world to come. Here is a creed that epitomizes the whole teaching on God, Christ, the Church, human destiny and whatever a Christian should know about Heaven and earth. A religion that possesses such a creed, a religion that for two thousand years has proclaimed it with unequalled authority, profound conviction, and untiring perseverance in every part of the globe, is certain of exerting a prodigious influence on the human mind. Hence the importance of this part of the Mass, doctrinal in character above all others.

*The Offertory.—Changes since the Early Days.—
The Offering by the Celebrant.—The Offering
of the Faithful.—Character and Splendor of
the Preface.—The Sanctus.*

The preparation has purified our heart and soul, enlightened our mind, and quickened our faith. We now come to what is the very essence of the Mass; the sacrifice, and therefore our attention and emotion must ever increase. As we remarked before, in the first centuries of the Church, a prudent watchfulness, nay, I was about to say, a sense of religious reserve prompted those in charge to dismiss all who were not marked with the seal of Baptism, and who, therefore, were impervious as yet to the spiritual mentality and regained purity of the Christians.

We have reached the Offertory. On the altar lies the matter of the sacrifice, presented in the early days by the people themselves, whence the name *offering* to designate this part of the Mass. This matter is the bread and the wine, and upon these two substances, so largely used by man for his own sustenance, will descend the most divine of honors,

the Consecration by Our Lord Himself, as at the Last Supper. What more valuable gift could earth proffer than the wheat, its very marrow and the grape, its very blood! Gaze upon the white and transparent wafer, the kneading of which the Church loves to entrust to virginal hands. Now it is the sole offering, but in the early days the offerings were as varied as they were abundant. All those who wished to receive, men, women, priests, religious of both sexes, proceeded to the altar and offered the bread and the wine. The archdeacon received the wine in a huge chalice. None but heretics and excommunicated persons were exempted from making this contribution to the sacrifice.

Restricted at first to the elements of the sacrifice, the offering in time became more varied. The Christians attached great importance to the support of their religion, of the clergy, and of the poor, and made contributions of money and gifts in kind. At times their generosity was more temporal than spiritual in character. Charlemagne chose this moment of the Mass to lay upon the altar the document specifying his concessions to the Holy See. Quite often donations to churches, monasteries, and other ecclesiastical institutions assumed the form of an engagement which imparted to charitable donations a sort of religious consecration. With these customs and usages the ceremony of the offering grew long and tedious. In order, therefore, to occupy

the congregation with religious thoughts during this ceremony, the custom sprang up in the fifth century of chanting a certain number of psalms while the procession filed by. Time brought other changes. In the ninth century the head of the family made the offering for his whole house; in the tenth, this became the duty of the mother. In the eleventh, the offering having somewhat diminished, it ceased to be obligatory under the old form. Nowadays, the chant of the Offertory is made up of a simple antiphon and the offering itself, in bread and wine, the Church supplying both elements. This brief sketch of the history of the Offertory should induce the faithful to be generous in their offering at the collection that has now practically taken its place.

At the Offertory, the priest takes the paten with the host and raises it heavenward, praying: "Accept, O holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God, this stainless host, which I, thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, for my innumerable sins, offences, and negligences, and for all here present; as also for all faithful Christians, both living and dead, that it may be profitable for my own and for their salvation unto life eternal." He then pours wine into the chalice, adding a few drops of water to recall the water that flowed from the heart of the Saviour when it was pierced by the centurion's lance.

Then he raises the sacred cup heavenward, say-

ing: "We offer unto Thee, O Lord, the chalice of salvation, beseeching Thy clemency that, in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty, it may ascend with the odor of sweetness." Finally, in order that his prayers may rise to Heaven like a sweet fragrance, the celebrant profusely incenses the oblations, the cross, the relics, and the altar.

Such is the offering of the celebrant, and such should be that of the members of the congregation. They should not be content with the material offering made at this part of the Mass and which can be so easily made generous. It is the duty of every Catholic to give of his means for the support of religious worship, but this contribution increases in value if we give freely and without compulsion. You ask yourselves what you are to offer to God, and, conscious of your spiritual poverty and your inability to offer an earthly gift worthy of Heaven, you hasten to shield your misery under the patronage of the God-Man. He is willing to assist you. I fancy I behold Him, pitying our needs, so well know to Him, accepting our prayers, more fervent because said during Mass and because they proceed from a heart purified by the "*Confiteor*" and from a mind enlightened by the Gospel. He unites His own prayers to those of the faithful and offers them all to His Father. The small hosts added to the large one at the Offertory express in a most beautiful and touching manner the part of the faith-

ful in the intercession and the homage rendered to God by the Supreme Mediator.

After the oblation of the bread and wine, the priest recites the psalm "*Lavabo*," expressing once again his desire to perform his sacred functions with a pure heart, so as to be worthy of being reckoned among the Just. He then renews his oblation to the Holy Trinity, and in a prayer called "*The Secret*,"—because it is said in a low voice,—he begs the congregation to join with him in his sacrifice, to which request the faithful answer through the "*Suscipiat*" of the server.

After spending a few moments communing silently with God, the celebrant feels the need of allowing his soul to overflow in that chant of praise and hymn of love called the Preface. Celebrant and worshippers immediately begin to vie with each other in their enthusiasm. What a dialogue condensed into these few sentences! The centuries are summoned to join in this homage. "*Per omnia sæcula sæculorum.—Amen.* Forever and ever.—Amen.—The Lord be with you.—And with thy spirit." The ordinary salutation here assumes a more solemn form to signify the complete union between priest and faithful. "*Sursum corda*, Lift up your hearts." Have no fear, minister of God, "*Habemus ad Dominum*, We have them lifted up unto the Lord." This is truly their place in this soaring chant. "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."—"It is

meet and just," reply the faithful in a spontaneous outburst of love.

The celebrant may now proceed, the attendants will surely follow him. Relying on this coöperation, conscious of the grandeur of his position, and standing erect with outstretched arms before the altar—a second Moses face to face with the Eternal on the Holy Mount—he intones the Preface, a creation as old as the Apostles, in which adoration, love, and enthusiasm voice without order and in tumultuous assertion the generous feelings of the heart. The beauty of the chant, which reminds one of the melopoeia of the choir in the ancient Greek tragedy, clothes the Preface with extraordinary splendor. "*Vere dignum et justum est, æquum et salutare*: It is truly meet and just, right and salutary that we should always and in all places give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord, Father Almighty, eternal God." Through whom? "Through Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom the Angels praise Thy majesty, the Dominations adore it, the Powers hold it in awe; the heavens, the virtues of the heavens and the blessed Seraphim do celebrate it with united joy."

O God, allow us to join in these great voices and to sing in our turn: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory." Isaias, in his vision, and, long after him, the author of the Apocalypse, heard this

hymn repeated continually before the throne of the Eternal. Let us sing to Christ also, and to do so worthily, let us intone the hymn of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"

The Climax of the Mass.—Profound Recollection of the Celebrant.—The Words of Consecration.—Bossuet on Sacrifice.—Emotion of the Congregation.

An impressive silence follows the Preface. The server rings the bell, and we come to the most touching part of the Mass. It is the *Canon*, from a Greek word meaning "rule." The Canon indeed is an immutable "rule," comprising the rites and prayers from the "*Sanctus*" to the "*Pater noster*." With what respect and emotion should we not accept and ponder these ceremonies, these words consecrated by the prayer of centuries! Fully devoted to his mission as one offering sacrifice, and shrouded in profound recollection, the celebrant speaks in a low tone of voice, until he reaches the "*Pater noster*." In former days a curtain was drawn immediately after the Preface, separating the priest from the congregation. This was to surround him in his solitude and to insure his intimacy with Heaven. This ancient rite is still observed in a few liturgies of the Orient. The celebrant, of course, does not forget the earth. At an hour when the graces and

blessings are to pour down like a mighty flood from on high, he prays for the Church; for her leaders and members; for the faithful; for those who have asked for the Mass to be said, and for those who actually attend it. He calls upon all the Saints in Heaven to assist him, because he is overwhelmed at the thought of the sacrifice he is about to offer. He extends his hands over the oblation, beseeching God that this sacrifice may be an immaculate one (*"sacrificia illibata"*), that his oblation may be "blessed, approved, ratified, and acceptable," that it "may become to us the body and blood of God's most beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord."

We are now arrived at the most solemn moment of the Mass, the Consecration. The priest is carried back in spirit to the Upper Room, and his thoughts and mind are centered upon Christ at the Last Supper. He borrows His very words, His actions, nay, even His personality. We all know the words he is about to pronounce, we have said them so many times with him: "The day before He suffered, Jesus took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and with His eyes lifted up toward Heaven, to God His almighty Father, . . . did bless, break, and give to His disciples saying, 'Take and eat ye all of this, for this is My Body.'" As Jesus took the bread into those hands of His, so fruitful in wonders of all kind, the priest takes the host into his hands, consecrated by the Pon-

tiff. As Christ lifted up his eyes to the Father at the Last Supper and on other solemn occasions, when He wrought His greatest miracles, so the priest also lifts up his eyes to Heaven, to give thanks to God, to beg for strength, and to ask God to clothe him with the necessary dignity, nay to effect in him a supernatural transformation at the moment when he pronounces the miraculous words.

To such an extent does he identify himself with Christ at this solemn moment of the transubstantiation, that he makes use of the pronouns, *I* and *We*. Harken to the divine words whispered by him over the Host: "*This is My Body. . . .*" All is over now. The sacramental formula has been pronounced; God is present on the altar; the Host has become the body of Christ. The celebrant holds it in his hands, genuflects and first adores, then elevates it,—whence the word *elevation*—in order to present it to the adoration of the faithful. Within the church the altar boy rings a small bell, a signal for those present to kneel and adore; outside, the tower-bell tolls for those absent, the neighbors and all the people around, inviting them to unite with those present at the sacrifice. Heaven unites with earth to pay homage to the Victim on the altar. I fancy I can see legions of angels prostrated and wrapt in silent adoration around the altar.

The consecration of the wine follows the consecration of the bread. "In like manner, after Jesus

had supped, taking this wondrous chalice into His holy and venerable hands, and giving thanks to God, He blessed and gave it to His disciples, saying, 'Take and drink ye all of this, for this is the chalice of My blood, the blood of the New and Eternal Testament; the mystery of faith; which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins. . . . As often as you do these things, ye shall do them in remembrance of Me.' "

The sacrifice is now consummated. Bossuet eloquently shows how the separation of the sacred species, bread and wine, is a figure of the death of Christ. "I see an altar," he says, "a sacrifice is about to be offered, the sacrifice of the Christians, the pure sacrifice and oblation, of which it is written that it shall be offered from the rising of the sun to the setting thereof. Where, then, are the appearances of the sacrifice? Where is the fire? Where the knife? Where the victim? . . . What simplicity in this sacrifice of the Christians! I see only bread on the altar, and a few drops of wine in a chalice. Nothing more is needed to offer the most holy, august and fruitful sacrifice that could be imagined. An all-powerful word will be pronounced; it will change this bread into the body of the Saviour and this wine into His blood." Here is the solemn moment of the Consecration. The priest or rather Jesus Christ himself says over the bread, "This is My Body," and over the wine, "This is My Blood."

It is no longer bread and wine. It is His body and blood. "They are divided," continues Bossuet, "the body is on one side, the blood on the other ; the word was the sword, the knife that wrought this mystical separation. Taking the words as they stand, we should have nothing more than the body, nothing more than the blood. If the two substances are together, it is because they have become inseparable since Christ's resurrection, for Christ, having risen, dies no more. To mark, however, that this Jesus, who can die no more, is nevertheless really sacrificed here, just as He was upon the cross, the words of Consecration set His body on one side, and His blood on the other, under two different species. Once again, therefore, He is marked with the seal of death, this Jesus who was once our victim on the cross, and is our victim again to-day, after a new fashion, by the mystical division of His body and blood."

After the Consecration.—New Oblation of the Host and of the Sacrifice.—All Attention centered upon the Last Supper.

The prayers after the consecration mark the joy felt by the priest and the people,—“Thy holy people, *plebs tua sancta*,” as the text of the Missal has it,—over the stupendous event that has just taken place, the real presence of Christ on the altar. Lifting up their thoughts to God, they offer Him a pure Host, a holy Host, an unspotted Host, the holy bread of eternal life and the chalice of everlasting salvation, praying that He may vouchsafe to accept this offering as He was graciously pleased to accept the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Abraham and Melchisedech, the remembrance of which has linked together the two Testaments throughout the centuries. The prayer continues entreatingly, supplicatingly: “Almighty God, command these things to be carried by the hands of thy holy angel to Thy altar on high, in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty, that as many of us as shall participate at this altar of the most sacred body and blood of Thy Son, may be filled with every heavenly grace and blessing, through the same Christ

Our Lord." Then follows a long invocation in behalf of the living and the dead in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

We have just witnessed the most touching part of the Mass, the sacrifice,—the part that appeals particularly to the soul. Whatever stirs up in us the religious fibre proceeds from the soul and returns to the soul. All the feelings aroused within us in the shadow of the Consecration,—as suffering, immolation, reparation and expiation,—all the memories of Christ's agony in Gethsemani, His bloody sweat, His sorrowful stations in the courts of Jerusalem, His journey to Golgotha, marked by the drops of blood shed upon the road; the vision of all the cruelties and the abandonment on Calvary; finally, the words murmured by His dying lips: "Mother, behold thy son" . . . "Father forgive them" . . . "All is consummated" . . . "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit," etc.,—all these memories have been revived and have passed before our minds during the short moments of the Mass like so many tableaux representative of our Lord's Passion, and they have breathed compassion, reconciliation, and repentance.

We have been deeply moved by these memories. The priest at the altar, transformed into one offering sacrifice, brandished as it were, a sword, the sword of the word; and with it he dealt the blow to the victim. We are almost seized with gloom, as

though some tragic event had just taken place. We have been breathing an atmosphere of suffering, and we believe we see traces of the shedding of blood. "The Church," writes a non-Christian author, "is herself the eternal drama of the Passion. Let us touch these walls cautiously, let us walk lightly on these flag-stones, for pain and suffering still linger here. A great mystery is being enacted."

The aspect of the mystery now changes. A moment ago it was the act of sacrifice,—an austere spectacle, full of appeal to the soul. Now, Holy Communion brings us back to the Last Supper, a powerful appeal to the heart, for everything radiates joy and gladness. The Last Supper! Who has not been thrilled in pronouncing those words? Who has not trembled with joy in reading again and again the divine pages of St. John's Gospel, carried back in thought to that Upper Room in which were grouped the poor ignorant men who were to change the face of the earth; where words were pronounced whose sweetness and power were to last forever; where, under the species of bread and wine was served a repast that was not of this earth! What joy to be able to reproduce daily the Last Supper at Holy Mass! There the words of the priest are more effective than the brush of Leonardo da Vinci. At his summons, Christ comes forth as lovely and as radiant as He was in the Cenacle. He invites us,

He awaits us: "*desiderio desideravi.*" Let us respond at once and with the help of the prayers of the Mass let us make ready for the heavenly banquet.

The Pater noster.—*Christ Represented by the Lamb.*
—The Priest Overwhelmed by the Sublimity of
his Function.—*The Faithful at Communion.*—
The Act of Thanksgiving.

The Preface preceded the Consecration; the *Pater noster* precedes the Communion. Like the Preface, the *Pater noster* has its prelude, and as at the Preface, so at the *Pater noster*, the "*Per omnia saecula saeculorum*" solemnly commands the attention of the faithful. Before the altar, with arms outstretched and hands raised to Heaven, the priest sings in vibrant tones the prayer with which Jesus Himself taught us to address Heaven. After the mission of consecrator there is no greater function entrusted to a mere mortal than thus to represent the whole people before the throne of the Eternal God. And what does the priest say to God? "Our Father, who art in heaven." What sweetness in these words "Our Father," addressed to one who is in Heaven, who is Almighty, who is God! This prayer is above all an homage paid to God: "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." We may petition this Father to give us our

daily bread, for He is good; we may beg of Him forgiveness of our sins and protection against temptation. What are the requests and ambitions of this earth compared with these great demands, these fervent petitions, when the priest, by a divine and human delegation, presents the prayer of all the people to the Eternal Father?

The *Pater noster* is an admirable preparation for Communion. We are invited to a banquet. The table is set. Our Lord Jesus Christ presides over it. No ordinary repast is served here, for this is a true banquet for souls, and souls require heavenly food. God Himself is about to nourish them, and He nourishes them, as He did the Apostles, with His own body and blood. We come to the banquet clad in "the wedding garment," *viz.*, with pure and spotless hearts. We have been prepared for it by the petitions of the *Pater noster*, which spell filial trust in God, submission to His will, pardon for our offences. The celebrant remembers all this, for at the *Agnus Dei* he invokes three times "the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world."

God is represented to us under the image of a Lamb! Could we think of a more touching figure? I love the white fleece of the lamb, its innocence and its meekness. I am deeply moved at the thought of its destiny, which is to be immolated in order to sustain man's life with its body and to purify him by its blood. The lamb has a place in religious history.

In the Old Law we behold it as the paschal Lamb, and its blood upon the door-posts protects Israel from the sword of the destroying angel. In the New Law it rose to the sublime dignity of representing Christ, this honor being traced to a threefold gift, since the Lamb is immaculate and meek, and offers itself as a victim that surrenders and endures everything, even death, without complaint. Glorified on earth, the lamb is glorified also in Heaven, where it is represented by St. John, pointing to the wounds of the Redeemer before the throne of God, surrounded by the elect, who have all steeped their garments in its blood, "*stolam . . . in sanguine Agni.*" Again, at the *Agnus Dei*, it is the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world, and, at Communion, it becomes the food of our souls.

In the prayers that follow, the Father and the Holy Ghost are associated with the Son, and the priest says: "Deliver me by this Thy most sacred body and blood from all my iniquities . . . and make me always adhere to Thy commandments, and never suffer me to be separated from Thee." What humility in this petition! Is it not the cry of a human creature that has, perhaps repeatedly, yielded to the weakness of the flesh by reason of its ever-changing will and its short-lived resolutions? It is the hope of the priest this time, and he promises God to be stronger from this moment on: "Let not the participation of Thy body, O Lord Jesus Christ,

which I, unworthy sinner, presume to receive, turn to my judgment and condemnation, but through Thy goodness, may it be to me a safeguard and remedy both of soul and body. . . ."

This prayer has re-assured and strengthened the celebrant. He now proceeds to administer unto himself Holy Communion. "I will take the bread of heaven," and holding the Host between his fingers, he pronounces three times the "*Domine non sum dignus*" of the centurion in the Gospel, making a profession of love and humility before receiving the God who is giving Himself to him. What an honor for the priest! He has immolated the Divine Victim and now he feeds upon His body and blood! His gratitude is overflowing. "May the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to life everlasting," he says, and then administers Communion unto himself, transported by the thought that he is at once the minister of the sacrifice who rendered God present and the guest at a banquet where God Himself has become our meat and drink. The same language is used in the communion under the species of wine.

The celebrant is indeed overwhelmed when, conscious of his own failings and deficiencies, he realizes the sublimity of his ministry. He is so puny, and yet with what magnificence has God dealt with him! How lofty is the priest's mission in the pulpit, when commenting upon the text of the Gospel; how lofty

in the Sacrament of Penance, when forgiving the sins and restoring peace to the consciences of men; loftier still at Mass, where God Himself seems to have abdicated into his hands. At his word is wrought the great miracle of transubstantiation, by which Heaven descends upon earth. He administers Communion. He holds the sacred Host—his very God—in his hands, carries it to his own lips, and gives it to his brethren. And the Saviour continues to play the part of the lamb, for, immolated at the Consecration, He delivers Himself without the slightest resistance in Holy Communion. But who is the priest? Is there in him any thing superhuman to fit him for this sublime function? A creature in the presence of his Creator, a weakling facing the "Strong God," a cold ember near the burning bush, a sinner before the Just One,—what can he offer, he the destitute, to Him who possesses all things? . . . But God is pleased with his humility, his good will and earnest endeavor, and accepts his threefold confession stammered out after the threefold assertion in the words of the centurion, "*Domine, non sum dignus,*" or in the humble answer of St. Peter: "Thou knowest that I love Thee!" When love proceeds from God and returns to God, it transforms everything and renders man capable of the most sublime deeds.

The celebrant, however, is not the only person to receive. The table is set at the entrance of the sanc-

tuary. It is called the holy table (*sacra mensa*). Nearby are gathered many of the faithful desirous of sharing in the sacred banquet. They have assisted with devotion at all the parts of the Mass: they have listened to the Master at the Gospel, they have bowed in profound reverence before the Redeemer at the Consecration, and now they are drawn to Jesus, the true Bread of Life. How they hunger and thirst for the body and blood of their God! They have joined with the priest in all the prayers preparatory to Communion, and now they are going to receive Him. The tabernacle is opened, the celebrant leaves the steps of the altar and advances towards the guests. This is no ordinary repast. It is a banquet for the elect. The guests seem to move in an atmosphere of recollection and modesty; their very bodies appear spiritualized, and there is in their eyes a light that seems to fathom the infinite, —a reflection of the serenity of Heaven and of the purity of their consciences, of their intimate colloquy with Christ, of a divine light which illumines the whole body. So I see them approaching the holy table, and then, returning to their seats with gravity and awe, bearing in their breasts the God of heaven and earth. Sublime religion that raises mankind to such heights!

Thanksgiving fittingly follows after Communion. "What shall I render to the Lord for all He hath rendered unto me?" These words of the liturgy

are the cry of the soul visited by God, not knowing how to thank Him for the gift. And yet the soul will thank Him with gratitude and love, and with fidelity, which is the seal of love. The Lord Himself has said, "This is the test that you love Me, that you keep My commandments." Fidelity is, therefore, what is promised by the communicant, filled with the presence of God, but he is well aware of his weakness, and so he begs at the same time for the grace to remain faithful. "May Thy body, O Lord, which I have received, and Thy blood, which I have drunk, cleave to my bowels, and grant that no stain of sin remain in me, who have been fed with this pure and holy Sacrament." What energy of language in these expressions! There is no question that during this sacrifice priests and faithful alike have drawn nearer to Christ and have benefited by contact with Him. Their firm purpose of amendment and their thanksgiving are proofs of this.

Thanksgiving! A sweet word, which recalls the gift bestowed on us. A sweet action which continues and perpetuates this gift in us by making us mindful of it. Watch the communicant rendering thanks to God. He is still thrilling from the excitement of the heavenly visit. He is still wondering how such a miracle could have been achieved. Humility, adoration, gratitude, love crowd into his heart. He tries to render homage proportionate to the greatness of the gift. He would like to acquit himself

of his debt in a worthy fashion. He rises to surpassing heights and strives to lift his soul to God, for there is something truly divine in this supernatural rapture, in this ecstasy fostered by unspeakable impressions and by a prolonged and entrancing colloquy with Christ.

We may be either fervent or lukewarm, but to maintain our fervor or to revive it, we must faithfully make our thanksgiving after holy Communion.

The Ite Missa est.—The Priest's Blessing.—The Last Gospel.—The Word sung by St. John.—Stirring Influence of the Logos, Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.—The End of the Mass an Apotheosis.

Another antiphon and a few orations, and Mass is over. "*Ite, missa est.*" The worshippers may now retire. Some leave in haste, eager to plunge immediately into the daily humdrum of life. These are the earthly, the lukewarm and the profane; little they know the glories of the Mass, little do they value the torrent of graces that flows from it. Fortunately, others have brought to this holy sacrifice souls more responsive, hearts more tender and more open to the influence from above. They have made the gift of themselves with more generosity, and for this reason they have received more.

The celebrant does not dismiss the people without bestowing upon them a special blessing. The shepherd and his flock were united before the sacrifice in the same faith; but apparently the Mass has brought

them into still closer union. Strong indeed are the ties of the soul! How can persons remain strangers to one another when they have prayed together, sung God's praises together, and perhaps wept together; when they have been present at the same banquet, experienced the same spiritual transports, and soared together to such exalted summits! The celebrant has seen, as it were, with his own eyes the treasures lavished upon the congregation from the altar, the tabernacle, and the cross. His desire, therefore, is that they should profit by this treasure for their own happiness and salvation. He then raises his hands towards Heaven, extends them over the faithful, and puts his whole soul into the blessing: "*Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus*—May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, bless you."

From beginning to end the Mass has kept Christ before our eyes. In the preparation He was the Purifier of our souls; in the instruction, the Preacher of good tidings; in the sacrifice, the Victim; in the Communion, the Host. And now the horizon grows still wider, and in the last Gospel, St. John lifts our souls to the very threshold of eternity. During the Mass, Christ reveals Himself to us chiefly as the Mediator and Redeemer. This is His human history. St. John describes Him as the Word, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and

depicts Him with all the functions and perfections proper to Him. This is His divine history. "*In principio erat Verbum*. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." From the very beginning He was; He was in God as the Word, *viz.*, as the eternal word, the intelligence, wisdom, thought eternally subsistent. "All things were made by Him." "For God," says Bossuet, "does everything by His Word, which is His wisdom and thought. Let us rejoice then in the Word, *i. e.*, in the thought and wisdom of God." In his account of the creation Moses praises the goodness of God, *vidit quod esset bonum*. The Mass, after celebrating God's love, in the last Gospel praises His wisdom,—the same wisdom that presided over the creation of the world.

It was St. John's privilege to reveal the mystery of Jesus to the Greek soul and to ours. He was best fitted for this task who had written, "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, . . . which our hands have handled of the Word of life . . . we declare unto you." The Word *Logos* signified, for the Greeks, reason, harmony, beauty, variety and grandeur in the world; it was some sort of an intermediary being between man and God. What a thrill must have passed through the soul of those lovers of the Word when they first realized that this was not a mere dream

or creation of the mind in quest of the ideal and tantamount to a divine shadow, but that the Logos was a living being, a person, and that person was Jesus Christ, Son of God, God Himself. Henceforth the conceptions of the mind united with the inspirations of faith to lead all thinkers to Christianity. And then, consider the gifts St. John discerns in the Word. "In Him was life and the life was the light of men. . . . He was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world." Life and light—what attractive attributes for the Word of God; for who does not love life, and in life, what is more penetrating, more dazzling, than light? John the Baptist was great because he gave testimony of the light. The great man is not the one born of blood, but the one who is the Son of light and who is born of God. In what heavenly light, to what dizzy heights, in what skies, to what abysses does St. John bid us follow him! The very origin of the Blessed Trinity, the eternal existence of the Word in the bosom of the Father, whose substantial and immanent thought He is; the universe created after the wisdom of the Word, the Word the center of life and light, adopting mankind, lavishing His gifts on His adopted child and revealing Himself on earth as "full of grace and truth": this is the vision we are called upon to contemplate in the last Gospel. The severer strokes

from the pen of St. Paul have given us the picture of Christ the Redeemer. To this picture succeeds another from the loving pen of St. John; it is that of Christ the Illuminator. And thus the Mass ends in a perfect apotheosis.

PART II

THE LIFEGIVING ELEMENTS IN THE MASS

I

Christ the Center of Life in the Mass.—Everything converges towards Him.—Attendance at Holy Mass the Greatest Action of the Day.—Intimacy with Christ is sweet.

So far we have endeavored to show the meaning of the Mass. It remains for us to speak of what may be termed its lifegiving elements.

The main quickening element of the Mass is Christ Himself. He rules supreme at the Mass and fills the entire function with His presence. From the Gospel to the Canon, from the Canon to the Communion, from the Communion to the end, it is Jesus Christ, Doctor, Redeemer, Bread of Life. All honor and glory are rendered to God through Him, with Him, in Him: "*per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso.*" Passing through Him, our prayer gains in confidence and devotion. His presence reassures us. His sweet face conquers our timidity. In the Old Testament, praises were addressed

chiefly to God Almighty, the Eternal and One God. All voices sang: "Blessed be Thou, O Lord God of Israel . . . for all eternity. Thine be magnificence, power, glory, praise . . . ; thine the kingdom; thine the treasures; thine all glory." With the New Testament the theme changes. True, we still give praise to God, but it is through Jesus Christ. In the Apocalypse St. John supplements the royal Psalmist: "To Thee that art a faithful witness, Jesus Christ, glory and empire for ever and ever. . . . Amen. . . . To Him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb, benediction, honor, glory, and power for ever and ever. Amen."

It is mostly at the Mass that we enter into the intimacy of the divine life with and through Christ. How sweet to spend half an hour in His presence! The day of every mortal is spent in trifles, even though, at times, some of us think we have achieved great things. What are these thousands of nugatory occupations when compared with the first act of a Christian at the beginning of the day, attendance at Holy Mass? He is brought into close contact with Christ; he derives from this contact purity, light, and love; a sweet warmth creeps into his soul in approaching the divine furnace; how wholesome and entrancing all this is! It is here, indeed, that we find aroma, encouragement, and a *sursum* for the day. The charm of this heavenly colloquy persists throughout the day, and we are almost tempted to

repeat with the disciples at Emmaus: "Abide with us, do not leave us: *mane nobiscum*." In one of the prayers after Communion we do, in fact, say to Him: "Do not allow us ever to be separated from Thee." Separation from Christ is the greatest misfortune; whereas union and intimacy with Him, realization of His presence, recognition of His voice, afford unspeakable sweetness. No more exquisite friendship, no more entrancing bliss could be found.

This is the fruit of the Mass.

Presence of the Blessed Trinity at Mass.—The Father.—The Holy Ghost.—Presence and Function of the Angels.

Christ fills the Mass with His presence, and yet Christ is not there alone. The Blessed Trinity, One God in three Persons; the Church in her threefold state, triumphant, suffering and militant, appear there also, to enlarge and animate the scene and transform the Mass into the radiating center of Christian life.

The Blessed Trinity is present, and this presence clothes the Mass with a special greatness. It is the Blessed Trinity that presides, as it were, over the unfolding mystery. And how, indeed, could it be absent? How could the Trinity be divided, how could the Son, how the Word Incarnate, be separated from it, without ceasing to be the second Divine Person? Far from creating a division in the Trinity, the Sacred Liturgy is careful to unite all three persons. The Mass begins with the sign of the cross: "*In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*" This sign is repeated one hundred times during the course of the ceremony. All the orations end with

the invocation to the Blessed Trinity. The Doxology, so often recurring, celebrates the Blessed Trinity: "*Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.*" The sacrifice is offered to the Blessed Trinity: "*Suscipe, sancta Trinitas, hanc oblationem*"; and to the Blessed Trinity is addressed the final prayer: "*Placeat tibi, sancta Trinitas.*"

The three Divine Persons are mentioned together at Mass; they are also named separately. Distinct mention of each one of them is made at the *Credo*, and each one is defined and honored by a special act of faith. At Mass, the Son is ever addressing Himself to the Father. Holy Mass, indeed, is the faithful echo of the Gospel, and Jesus, the Redeemer, who offers Himself to the Father as an atoning victim for the sins of the world, maintains the same deferential and supplicating attitude characteristic of Him in the Passion. This attitude is like that of a criminal speaking to an offended superior and begging for pardon. Thus, above the scene seemingly occupied by Christ the Son alone, looms forth the more austere personality of the Father, to whom the incense of sacrifice rises, who accepts the prayers, grants the requests, and forgives. This is the Father's share in the Mass. He represents both justice and mercy.

The Holy Ghost is not forgotten either. The many signs of the cross, the doxology, the oblation made to the whole Trinity ("*Suscipe, Sancta Trini-*

tas"), the invocation of the Holy Ghost at Communion ("*cooperante Spiritu Sancto*"), at the blessing ("*Benedicat vos Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus*"), and like expressions which we find in the Ordinary of the Mass, remind us of the fact that the Son acts in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost: "*in unitate Spiritus Sancti.*" Moreover, the Holy Ghost is invoked under two special attributes: as Life-Giver and as Sanctifier. We are told in the Bible that at the beginning of all things, the Spirit hovered above the waters, actively coöperating in the creation of the world ("*ferebatur super aquas*"). We invoke this same Spirit at Mass as the first cause of life ("*Spiritum vivificantem*"). Of what life? Another text explains: "*Veni, sanctificator Spiritus,*" "Come upon us, sanctifying Spirit!" At the oblation, the celebrant remembers how the Last Supper and the eating of the Paschal Lamb failed to transform the Apostles, and that the action of the Holy Spirit was required to accomplish this. Hence he calls down upon the sacrifice he is about to offer, the blessing of that same Spirit who wrought the miracle of Pentecost. What a close union of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost we have here!

As we descend from these heights we meet the angels, whose share in the Mass consists in facilitating this intercourse between God and man. We have heard the celebrant solemnly sing

in the Preface of the Blessed Spirits who praise God's majesty,—the Dominations who adore Him, the Powers who revere Him, the Heavens, the Virtues and the Seraphim who exalt Him with one voice. These names designate the innumerable army of angels that glorify the Most High through Christ our Lord. How, indeed, could this army, which surrounded Christ during His mortal life, desert Him now in the sacramental life that perpetuates His presence among us? Meseems I see them by the thousands, hurriedly gathering around the priest as soon as the *Sanctus* bell announces the approach of the most solemn action of the sacrifice. I feel their touch and the caress of their rustling wings, and, at the Consecration, I unite with them when they bow their heads and lost in adoration and ecstasy, prostrate themselves before the Host. How sweet this contact with the ethereal Spirits, whose flight gives zest and ardor to our prayer; heavenly messengers ever ready to convey our petitions to the Eternal in the heights of Heaven! For does not the celebrant beseech God at a most important moment of the Mass that his oblation may be "carried by the hands of His holy angel to His altar on high, in the sight of His Divine Majesty?" What fervor and what enthusiasm then, is not this appearance of the heavenly court at the mystery of Mass capable of creating in the hearts of the faithful!

The Church present at Mass.—The “Communicantes.”—The Communion of Saints.—Interchange of Merits.

The Church, too, is present at Mass. Obedient to Christ's injunction, “Do this in commemoration of Me,” the Church, indeed, has designed the whole ordinance of the Mass. She it is who furnishes the sacrificing priest, taken from the ranks of mortal men, and who secures the perpetuity of the sacrifice.

Consider her place in the Mass more closely. She is distinctively present in three groups:—as the Church triumphant, suffering, and militant. Among the first words of the Canon there is one that should command our close attention. It is the word “*Communicantes*,” which denotes the concourse of all three churches, or the Communion of Saints.

There exists a sort of communion between all the members of the human race. They are brought together by the community of their nature, and their social life begets a certain solidarity among them. Men cannot remain isolated and strangers to one another. By the very fact that people live

together they become subject to the various influences that human contact inevitably entails. As there exists in nature a mutual radiation between different bodies, the most surprising and most powerful illustration of which is radium, so there exists in mankind a constant emission of forces that brings the individual into unceasing contact with his fellow-men. Hence a reciprocal influence for good and for evil.

How different this Communion of Saints from the unavoidable communion existing between human beings too often united only to harm one another. In Baptism, the Church marks her saints, *i. e.*, all her children called to holiness, with an indelible character, which gives them the same vocation, the same faith, the same destiny, the same cause to defend, the same Heaven to gain. This is the communion of souls; an enormous army reaching out beyond all boundaries, coming down through the successive ages and uniting in one spiritual family the grandest and purest representatives of the human race. This army is made up of the three Churches.

The members of a religious community hold all things in common. Of late the word "solidarity" has been used quite extensively as a substitute for the specifically and to many unpleasantly Christian term "charity," which latter is now replaced by the word "philanthropy." Philanthropy and solidarity—what cold, meaningless words when we

stop to consider how Christianity has raised the concept of brotherhood to heights no human power will ever attain. It is within the power of men to establish among themselves a solidarity of interests and instruction, of material, intellectual, and social life; but it is not within their power to establish a solidarity of merit, since merit is a personal and incommunicable property. The "*Communicantes*" of men, therefore, must stop at the threshold of merit. Now, what men dared not to attempt, religion has achieved in the Communion of Saints by making merit the common property of all its members ("*quorum meritis.*") First come the merits of Christ,—a mighty river flowing from a perennial spring, and sweeping before it our offences, and leaving behind only our good actions and the grant of pardon. To these are added the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, those sacred persons who, by their contact with the Redeemer, have learned the secret of blotting out with human merits the failings of men. Many do little more than borrow from this treasure; others, the valiant and the elect, consider it a personal duty and honor to add to it. Who has not met with such souls, athirst for sacrifice, whose life is one continuous immolation, who crave only to atone and to suffer, and who, even in suffering, consider not themselves but others. They are truly elect souls, ever mindful

of St. Paul's entreaty to "complete the Passion of Christ." The Communion of Saints, involving a participation in the merits of all, is the greatest boon love was able to invent and realize.

The Church Triumphant at Mass: The Blessed Virgin, the Apostles, the Saints.—The Suffering Church: The Souls in Purgatory.

Nowhere is the union and exchange of memories, prayers, and gifts between Heaven, Earth, and Purgatory more striking than at Holy Mass.

We commune with the triumphant Church, *i. e.*, the blessed inmates of Heaven. At their head is "Mary ever Virgin, Mother of Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord." How, indeed, could the Mother be forgotten in the sacrifice,—she who gave us Christ and who, after the joys of Nazareth, suffered all the torments of the Passion, ascended Calvary as the Queen of Martyrs, and there, steeped in sorrow, adopted us as her children? The name of the Blessed Virgin Mary occurs eight times during Mass.

"*Communicantes*": We commune with the Apostles, "Peter, Paul, Andrew, James, John," and all the others. The names of the Apostles have been fittingly placed in the Mass. They were present at the Last Supper, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the first Communion, the first Mass. To

them were addressed the mysterious words repeated by the priest at the Consecration. In the beginning their faith and love were weak, but gradually they were transformed into confessors and martyrs. The Sacred Liturgy celebrates them in its hymns: "*vos sæculorum iudices et vera mundi lumina*—you judges of the centuries and true lights of the world." They occupy the first places in the Church, whose founders they are. They deserve to be invoked and to be present wherever prayers are offered for the living and the dead.

"*Communicantes*": We also beseech Thee, O God, "with all Thy Saints, by their merits and prayers, grant that we may be always defended by the help of Thy protection." All the Saints, therefore, are invoked in a body; they are invited to be present at the sacrifice by their memory, their protection, their intercession, but especially by the communication of their merits.

And lo! The celestial army answers the call of the celebrant and the congregation praying in the name of Christ. How we would like to know all these saints and to call upon every one of them by his or her proper name. The Roman Church—as was her right—inserted in the Ordinary of the Mass the names of a few of her saints: Saints Linus, Cletus, Clement, Xystus, Cornelius, Cyprian, Lawrence, Chrysogonus, John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian. Other churches followed her example,

each one taking pride in displaying its own spiritual heroes on honor rolls called dyptichs, inscribed with the names of the local or national saints, in order to incite the devotion of the people by a sort of family worship towards their glorious fathers in the faith and to obtain from them more generous favors for their race. The dyptichs were read during the "canon" of the Mass, and persons whose names figured there for a certain length of time were finally looked upon as saints; hence the title "canonized" applied to saints recognized as such by the Church. This power of canonizing wielded by every church in particular laid itself open to many abuses. It was found necessary therefore to restrict it; and now it is the exclusive privilege of Rome. The list of the saints mentioned in the *Memento* of the Mass is henceforth fixed and unchangeable. Individual churches, desirous of paying special tribute to Saints of their own, may satisfy their fervor in a relative way in the "Proper of the Saints." Fortunately there are no boundaries in Heaven. The triumphant Church is the most Catholic of all, and legions of Saints intercede for us there.

The multitude of the primitive Christians, all those who in days gone by have believed and prayed as we believe and pray, still live in God. Their deeds and words encourage us from the altar. Their example is inspiring, their company is comforting. Right and left they take our hands,

martyrs, confessors, saints great and lowly, who have recited the same *Credo*, celebrated the same mysteries, preached the same Gospel as we.

The Church draws profusely from the treasure of merits stored up by Christ and His saints. Heaven and earth are represented at the Mass, the greatest names obtain the most conspicuous and honorable places. There is a place for the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There is a place for Christ and the countless manifestations of His human life: the Infant Jesus, the Preacher of the Gospel, the Hero of the Last Supper, the Victim of Calvary. There is a place for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother, crowned with all the glory showered upon her throughout the ages in prayer and in art. All these have their place of honor in the smallest of churches, as also St. Joseph and the patron saint of each parish.

The larger a church, the more numerous as a rule become its statues and protectors. The sanctuary and the great nave make place to receive them; and separate chapels are dedicated to the patrons of the various guilds and sodalities. Even outside the church, statues are erected in large numbers. They cover the entire façade, they nestle under the peristyle, on the spires, the turrets, the bell-towers, the pilasters, spreading life everywhere and proclaiming to all men the marvelous achievements of the faith and genius of our fathers. The Rheims cathedral

alone, before the World War, counted as many as ten thousand statues or sacred figures pictured on its stained glass windows. What a cloud of witnesses! What an invisible, yet attentive audience thrilling at the sacred mysteries, beneath their frame of stone or bronze, and imparting life to this magnificent structure. To look at the façade of a Gothic cathedral you would think that the Saints vie with the angels in number and devotion. While the big bell echoes forth its urgent and imperative appeal, they seem to say to us in intimate and friendly whispers: "Step inside, we are waiting for you." And we enter, no matter how magnificent or how humble the church may be.

From the Church triumphant let us pass to the suffering Church, for the souls in Purgatory also expect to be remembered and prayed for at Holy Mass. Where are our departed ones,—those souls related to us by the strongest ties of blood and friendship? Which of them are in Purgatory, and which are not? What a comfort in our bereavement when the Church assures us that all intercourse with our departed ones is not ended at death, that we may still continue our relations with those who have loved us, and that our message to them may take the form of a gift. And what a gift! We ask for them at Mass "refreshment, light, and peace" (*locum refrigerii, lucis et pacis.*) Refreshment, light, and peace, threefold element that makes

for perfect happiness! *Refreshment* by the possession of God for those who thirst after Him and burn with a fever to behold Him; *light* in the sight of God for those who lament their detention in the land of shadows and mysteries and long for the brightness of Heaven and the beatific vision of God; *peace* in the bosom of God for those who, after having long suffered the brunt of battle on earth, from within and without, are still engaged in a struggle with pain and suffering in Purgatory. No better wishes for perfect joy and happiness can be found than those formulated by the Church in the *Memento* for the dead.

What benefit does the Mass confer upon the dead? I am tempted to add: What benefits do the dead confer upon the Mass? Holy Mass should inspire the faithful with a burning desire to hear it; but alas! such is our nature that we feel less inclined to the things of God than to the things of this world, and that, among the things of God, those captivate us most which are mixed with a human element that appeals to the heart. This is quite evident in the case of prayers for the dead. We should feel drawn towards the Mass by the fact that we have the assurance of finding God there, but if, over and above this assurance, we know that we shall also meet our own dearly beloved dead, who were once faithful guests at this same banquet; if we feel certain that, at the invocation of the priest and

the faithful, they become, as it were, present with us, and that, at the *Memento* for the dead, the drops of Christ's precious blood, shed upon the altar, fall as a refreshing dew upon the suffering souls in Purgatory, no one will ever wrest from our Christian heart, sorrow laden but still alive with a burning faith, that imperative desire of seeking at Holy Mass the supreme consolation of getting in touch with our beloved ones and of conferring favors upon them, by resuming with them beyond the grave that intercourse seemingly interrupted forever by death. That is why most of the Masses said at the request of the faithful are offered up for their departed relatives and friends.

The Church Militant at Mass.—Prayers for the Pastors and the Flock.—Stress Placed on Temporal Interests.—Announcements.

After the Church triumphant and the Church suffering, we come to the Church militant. We could not afford to forget the Church militant, since all who attend Holy Mass are members of it. At the very beginning of the canon, *i. e.*, at the "*Te igitur*," the priest recites the prayer for the living and, addressing the Father "most merciful," converses with Him of the sacrifice which is being offered, first in behalf of the Holy Catholic Church, that He may "vouchsafe to grant her peace, unity, and protection, and govern her throughout the world," and then in behalf of certain members mentioned by name, the Pope, the Bishop of the diocese, and "all who profess the Catholic and Apostolic faith."

This is a very general prayer. It is intended for the whole Church, for the head and all the members. The congregation, however, may rightly claim a prayer of a more intimate sort and one that concerns them more personally. The *Memento*

for the living answers this desire. "Be mindful, O Lord," says the priest, "of Thy servants, men and women, and of all here present, . . . for whom we offer or who offer up to Thee this sacrifice of praise for themselves and all related to them, for the redemption of their souls, for the hope of their salvation and welfare." After the Consecration, when the flood-gates of grace are open, the celebrant resumes this prayer: "Also to us sinners, Thy servants, confiding in the multitude of Thy mercies, vouchsafe to grant some part and fellowship with Thy holy Apostles and martyrs."

We have all noted this solicitude on the part of the celebrant for the welfare of the Church militant. His prayer is for her supreme head as much as for the least of her children. He prays for her unity and harmony, the spread of her doctrine and of her works, the triumph of justice, the sanctification of souls ("*sanctificare digneris*"), the conversion of sinners, and for all the faithful the reward of Heaven in company with the Apostles, martyrs, and all the Saints.

There is one part of the Sunday Mass that is less religious in character. The temporal element mingles for a while with the spiritual, affording a moment of relaxation to the congregation, during which time the pastor may address them in a more informal way. This part of the Mass (called *prône* in French) comprises not only the reading

and explanation of the Gospel, but also the prayers recited before and after this reading, the announcements concerning the temporal or moral interests of the parish and the country. The Church does not sever communication with the outside world even during the Holy Sacrifice. One door, at least, is open upon the world, and the same pastor who on the Rogation days sowed his blessings upon the field now requests, besides supernatural graces, overflowing granaries for the farmer (*"abundantia in turribus tuis"*).

So much for the temporal aspect. The family or social interests also find their place in this part of the Mass. The announcements, indeed, make known the order of services for the week, commend the sick to the prayers of the faithful, publish the banns of matrimony, inform the parishioners of the works that need their assistance and apprise them of all important religious and civil news. By the very fact that it blends moral and dogmatic teaching with the lessons of the Gospel, the "prône" enters into the very fibre of our daily life. All through the centuries this friendly talk of the pastor with his flock was the only public oration that people always heard, even when the tribune was silent and the press still unborn. In the cities, and still more in the country, the "talk" delivered by the pastor, whose authority reached out beyond the spiritual into the temporal domain, furnished the Church

with the opportunity of mingling in the life of the nation. From generation to generation the communications between different members of the same parish took place in church. The friendly relationship and sociability between neighbors were created within the shadows of God's temple, and without this meeting place even neighbors would often have remained strangers to one another.

The High Mass.—Special Features of the High Mass.—High Mass, the Solemn Meeting of the Parish.—High Mass, the School of Sociability and Brotherhood.

There is a Mass to which the Church militant is particularly invited and where the faithful receive special graces, take part in an office that is more solemn and more dramatic, calculated to produce more varied and deeper impressions:—I mean the High Mass. Besides the fact that it is sung, instead of being merely read, it is characterized by special ceremonies: the Asperges, the procession, and, in some countries, the distribution of the Blessed Bread.

The Asperges has its own poetry and spiritual efficacy. See how the faithful bow their heads and bless themselves when the priest passes by, sprinkling them with holy water. Holy Water is a mixture of water and salt. Water cleanses and purifies, and salt preserves from corruption. The doors of the Israelites were sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb by means of hyssop, the thickly clustered leaves of which easily retain water (*"Asperges me hyssopo et mundabor."*)

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The Asperges has something of the character of an exorcism. Science itself has sought to exorcise water, so to speak, by extreme care in filtering it. Holy water is subjected to a process of spiritual filtration, for in sprinkling the faithful with it, the Church seeks to drive away all the unclean influences by which the atmosphere of the soul is infected, and particularly the devil, whom Holy Writ depicts as prowling around for the destruction of souls.

Purified by the aspersion, the congregation now forms into a procession, the Dominical Procession. The Church has always showed a great fondness for processions. You have no doubt remarked the spirit and enthusiasm marching soldiers communicate to each other. In the Dominical Procession, Christians march towards the great mystery of Calvary. Nowadays, the procession takes place, if at all, only in church, but formerly it was customary to have it outdoors. This custom still obtains in many places. Charlemagne's Capitularies enjoined the Dominical Procession with a view of sanctifying the entire vicinity. Can you imagine a more graceful picture than that of a whole parish grouped in the open air around a cross, near the church, or in the cemetery, where the ancestors sleep, and sending forth to heaven the echoes of the earth in chants, rustic perhaps, but none the less expressive of an ardent faith?

Now the candles are lighted on the altar. The eye of man reacts to light. Very often, too, loving hands have gathered flowers of charming color and sweet perfume from the neighboring fields. We are almost tempted to cry out with Holy Scripture: "Bloom forth, ye flowers, as the lilies; diffuse your aroma; gracefully spread your petals; sing your song and bless the Lord for His works."

After these preliminaries, the High Mass begins. In thoroughly Catholic parishes there is always a full attendance. Sunday is the day of rest. This halt in the daily routine is a priceless gift to man. The busiest man may breathe freely and rejoice in the thought that he is a free being and not a slave sentenced to penal servitude for life. This thought gives him a sense of dignity. He lays aside his working clothes and puts on his Sunday garb. This gives him a sense of respectability in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. Very often the entire family turn out for the High Mass, even the little children who cannot be left at home alone. True, they are too young to understand, and yet the majesty of the place and the ceremonies of the office make a deep impression upon their imagination and remind them of the existence of a being superior to their father and mother. They are initiated into the mysteries of their religion through the eyes and also through the ears, for there is always solemn chanting at the High Mass. When

we pass by a small country church and harken to the voices from within, how can we refrain from exclaiming: These are poor people, bondsmen attached to the soil; but they are not as unhappy as one might think, for is not song the outburst of man's most intimate feelings, and the vibration of a soul overflowing with happiness? The laborer in the field is doomed to heavy work. With the sweat of his brow he waters the soil that nourishes him, and yet he is satisfied with his lot, for he has an ideal in view. There is something infinite and eternal in his belief. One has only to look at him striking his breast at the *Confiteor*, listening to the words of Christ at the Gospel, sympathizing with the Victim of the sacrifice at the Consecration, enkindling the flame of love in his heart at Communion,—to be convinced of the far-reaching influence of religion upon these lowly people and of the power it has of raising them up when Heaven is the prize.

High Mass, then, has its own particular character. It is said by the pastor for the intention of his flock; it is the occasion of the most solemn meeting of the parishioners. To pray together, to sing together, to listen together to the word of God, to receive together, and in this manifestation of the same faith and love to share the general enthusiasm and ardor common to any crowd, imparts consolation and encouragement, and communicates spiritual life. Let us not neglect High Mass for

what we sometimes call a "short mass." Let us not barter with Christ as to the length of time to be devoted to His sacrifice, for He spares neither His time nor His graces.

Duties of the Faithful at Mass.—The People should take an active part in the Mass.—Sublime Dialogues between Celebrant and Congregation.—The Attention Changes and takes on new Fervor at each Part of the Mass.—Daily Attendance at Mass.

In the foregoing considerations we have concentrated our efforts upon explaining the part of God, the part of the Church, and the part of the celebrant at Mass. What of the part of the people? The part taken by the people may and should be great. This depends upon the people themselves. Attendance at Holy Mass is a very praiseworthy action, but this does not suffice. *We must play our part in the Mass.* There are some people who are merely spectators at Holy Mass; they are not well-informed, not very interested, and they hurry through it as a mere formality inherited from their ancestors, a custom prescribed by religion under pain of mortal sin, an observance to which, perhaps, they submit reluctantly. Who has not remarked a certain class of people late to arrive and always in a hurry to leave, indifferent to what is

going on, crouching in a corner, without a prayer book, absolute strangers to the ceremony, which they hope will be brief, their minds filled with the topics of the day, strictly correct in their behavior, but present in body only and absent in mind; some not even deigning to bend their knees at the solemn moment of the Consecration?

The behavior of a true Christian is quite different. We know that we must take part in the Mass, that we must be active, not passive. We are summoned thither by one who wishes to speak to us and to listen to us, by Jesus Christ Himself. We must give something ourselves if we desire to receive something in return. The faithful are closely united with the celebrant. At the very beginning of the Mass we witness a dialogue of sublime thought and deep feeling between the priest and the server. The altar boy lends to his sublime answers the sweetness and innocence of his age; but what power has he, what knowledge to understand these words, and what authority, if he speaks only in his own name? We know, however, that he speaks in the name of all who are present. At the Introit, at the Kyrie, at the Preface, frequently during the ceremony, seven times when answering the *Dominus vobiscum*, he assumes responsibilities and formulates promises which, to be of any value, must be those, not of childhood, but of mature age, the age of reason and full responsibility. This boy

speaks in our name. It is much to be regretted that we do not speak for ourselves, for during the course of the Mass the celebrant reminds us that we are united with him, that we coöperate with him, that his sacrifice is also our sacrifice: ("*vestrum sacrificium . . . oremus . . . orate, fratres.*")

The lack of communication between the celebrant and the congregation may be traced to several causes. There is no unresponsiveness on the part of the faithful; their very presence at the sacrifice proves that; but they do not know, they do not understand the words. It is not their language that is spoken. Latin is the language of the Church, and she will never relinquish it. However, it is not understood by the people at large. Besides a great many people are as ignorant of the meaning of the ceremonies as of the language spoken by the priest. Finally the general weakening of our faith has made us less attentive at Mass, which is a "mystery of faith" (*mysterium fidei*), as we read in the text itself.

All these obstacles must be overcome; our faith must be revived, and we must obtain a better understanding of the Mass. Many books have been written with this end in view, and it is our hope that these humble talks will also achieve something in that direction. What we must be convinced of, in the first place, is that we are *actors*, and not merely *spectators*, at the Holy Sacrifice. These expressions are

quite to the point, for it is a drama that is being enacted before our eyes; some one is dying for us, and this some one is Christ. Perhaps you will be seen tonight at the theatre, deeply moved at the misfortune of some imaginary personage, and now you remain cold and unmoved at a sacrifice where your person, your soul, and your eternal salvation are at stake!

The feelings we have endeavored to arouse in the course of these meditations seem to me essential if we wish to assist at Holy Mass with proper devotion. In the first part, *viz.*, the preparation for the sacrifice, we must prepare our minds and hearts. At the very thought that we are soon to be admitted to intimacy with Christ, and to what is most sublime and most divine in Him, his Gospel, his Passion, his Last Supper, we should endeavor to purify our souls by an act of contrition, when reciting the *Confiteor*, and by yielding to the glowing influence of the *Gloria in excelsis*. During the instruction, Jesus, or His Apostle, St. Paul, should find us attentive, spell-bound listeners and our faith quickened and exalted by the enthusiastic chant of the *Credo*. During the second part of the Mass, the Offertory, we should bring our own offering to the altar, and endeavor to make it as generous as we can; then we should center our whole attention upon the drama of Calvary, our souls filled with pity for the sufferings of the Redeemer.

The Mass is a great school of sacrifice. To assist at Mass is to recall all the sufferings of the Saviour and to follow Him step by step to Gethsemani and the Praetorium. It is to climb the road that leads to Golgotha with the Blessed Virgin Mary, His mother, with Mary Magdalen and St. John; it is to be present at the whole of His Passion. We cannot evoke such memories as these without stirring all our moral sensibilities. In the presence of Christ dying for us on the Cross, compassion, gratitude, and repentance enter into our hearts, move our souls and prepare the way for those noble decisions that are expected of us. The sufferings of Christ were the school of science and knowledge for many a Saint, and it is there that the Saints acquired their passionate desire for sacrifice and that power to immolate themselves which astonished the world. Is it expecting too much of ordinary Christians to ask that the fruit they gather from assisting at Mass and from the mystery which Holy Mass is and recalls, should be the resolution and the strength to undergo necessary sacrifices and privations? For, after all, every life must have its offertory.

Here the heart comes to the assistance of the will. We are approaching the moment of Communion. What a marvelous ceremony this is, and what a miracle is wrought daily before our eyes! A moment ago we were standing at the foot of the cross; sprinkled, as it were, with the blood of the Divine

Victim. Now we are back again at the Last Supper, and Jesus gives Himself to us as our nourishment and our food. He said after the Last Supper that the greatest proof of love is to die for one's friends. Nothing could be more true, but man can die only once; he has but one life to give, whereas Jesus Christ has found the secret of dying for us every day, so great is His love. He has found for our nourishment a food that will never fail, and which is nothing less than Himself. The love of a God was needed to achieve this wonder of adding to the endless shedding of blood in the sacrifice the everlasting throbs of the heart in Holy Communion.

To assist at Mass in this fashion constitutes the greatest action of a Christian's life. It is easy to understand why so many Catholics are eager to renew their strength at this source of divine life by daily attendance at Holy Mass. We understand also the full import of the judgment passed upon this or that man, when people say, "He does not go to Mass."

Mass in the Catacombs

Since Holy Mass is the center of Christian life, let us stay within the radius of its sweet, penetrating, and enhancing influence, and in order that our souls may derive still greater benefits therefrom, let us go back in thought to the times when this influence was at its height. Let us retrace our steps to the very beginning and picture to ourselves the Mass as it was celebrated in the Catacombs. The progress of the history of Liturgy enables us to reconstruct it and a strong attraction is felt nowadays towards these ages consecrated by the blood of martyrs.

Let us imagine ourselves back in the third century, at a time when Christianity had triumphed over the Roman world and was beginning to perceive in its growth a sure promise of future glory. The empire of the Caesars still held many an enemy of the Christian faith, and so the Church preferred to celebrate her mysteries in the darkness of the Catacombs. The third century indeed witnessed many a bloody persecution, not the least of which was that of Decius, followed by that of Diocletian, which merited for this whole period the name of "era of the martyrs."

Religious worship in the Catacombs or in private cemeteries was a step in advance. Real churches had begun to take the place of the first meeting places, supplanting the high room, or the poor dwelling generally hidden away in the lowly districts, where in Apostolic times divine office was celebrated. The Roman house was well adapted to religious services and could be easily transformed into a church and a house of God ("*domus ecclesiae et domus Dei*"). Beside these urban churches, composed of an *atrium* and a *basilica*, there were the cemeterial churches. The first Christians were recruited from among the laborers and the poor, but in time the Church extended her conquests to the upper classes, and even to the patrician families. These noble-born converts threw open to their coreligionists, despised slaves of yesterday, but to-day their equals before God and their brothers in the faith, the large subterranean vaults which they used as burial places. These vaults, protected by Roman law, were little short of inviolable, and in them the Christians were even allowed to bury their dead. This necropolis served also as a temple for the living, who gathered there mainly to observe the "vigils." They met to commemorate the anniversary of the martyrs and also the private anniversaries celebrated by different families ("*pro dormitione*").

In those days, when persecution was ever threat-

ening, religious meetings were held, preferably during the night, at an hour that won for this office the name of the *office of the cock-crow*, and for the Christians the accusation of shunning the light. Let us follow these men and women to the cemetery of Domitilla, so called after the martyr of this name, a member of the family of the Flavii, which gave three emperors to Rome in the first century. Before daybreak they issue discreetly from their dwelling, gliding along close to houses like nimble shadows. The poor and the laborers emerge from their holes in the Suburra, the patricians and Roman matrons descend from their palaces on the Coelius and the Viminal. Not even the Palatinum is excepted, and from the palace of the emperors emerge believers won over from the ranks of the soldiers and praetorian officers. All these tributary streams unite on the Appian Way. There the feast of the "Agape" is prepared for them in a vast hall used as a *triclinium*. After this is over, they descend by a staircase through subterranean galleries to the *cubiculum* for the Holy Sacrifice. As they advanced along these passages, guided by the faint light of clay lamps, they contemplated and meditated on the appealing pictures which modern excavations have unearthed and which exhibit the very soul of the Catacombs.

Let us not for a moment foster the thought that the *loculi* which cover both walls of the narrow

passage-way spread a note of gloom over the meetings of the Christians in these heroic ages. On the contrary, the pictures they beheld there were: the dove, the messenger of good tidings; the anchor, the symbol of hope; the palm, the emblem of martyrdom. These evoked in their souls the cry, *Sursum corda*: Lift up your hearts (to God). Christ, under the figure of a lamb offering itself for slaughter, or as a shepherd leading his flock or carrying on his shoulders the strayed sheep, speaks to their imagination and to their hearts. Fear has no hold on these souls, these heroes of Baptism, who tread an earth that is ever quaking beneath their feet, yet keep their eyes constantly fixed upon Heaven.

Perhaps as they were entering this underground sanctuary, their ears caught the cries of the wild beasts which their persecutors had so often unloosed against them and a number of which were still kept in reserve for them. And may not this very altar upon which the Holy Sacrifice is to be offered, be the tomb of a martyr who but recently laid down his life for the faith? Those present to-day may have known him, and were perhaps eye-witnesses of his death, and this fact stimulates them to pray with greater confidence, to ask him to protect them, and, if need be, to make them worthy of him.

And now the Divine Office begins. The presiding

bishop is seated in his *cathedra* (seat), for by his eminent dignity he is the center of the group. He greets the assembly with the salutation current among the ancient Patriarchs: "Peace be with you. The Lord be with you." After this a few prayers are said, remarkable for their all-embracing charity and catholicity. An echo of these prayers is still heard in the sublime orations sung on Good Friday. Then followed the Litany, which comprised petitions for all the needs of the Church, for her members, priests and faithful, for the living and the dead, and according to the record preserved by Tertullian, even for the persecuting emperors,—a sublime example of forgiveness!

After these prayers came readings from the Old and the New Testament or from simple writings concerning the Church. These documents were often immediately commented upon by orators,—at times illustrious ones, such as Origen in the third century, and the Fathers of the fourth. The "Acts of the Martyrs" read to the audience struck a note of thrilling actuality in the hearts of the congregation. With what attention would be received messages relating to the various incidents of a martyr's death and starting, for instance, with words like these: "The servants of Christ who are in Vienne and in Lyons of Gaul to their brethren of Asia and Phrygia, who have the same faith and the same hope in the Redemption as we ourselves, peace,

grace, and glory through God the Father, and through Jesus Christ, Our Master."

But why go out of Rome into Gaul and Asia in quest of religious emotions and lessons of heroism? The city of Nero, Domitian, Decius, Valerian, Diocletian, and even Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, is quite able to hold the Christians in suspense. How many times, at the vigils in the Catacombs, or before Mass began, has not the Pontiff bidden the witnesses of a martyr's death relate the tortures which the brethren underwent the day before or perhaps on that very day! At his request they rise and describe the shouts of the populace, the cruelty of the executioners, the ferocity of the beasts, but above all the indomitable constancy of the victims in the midst of cruel suffering. We may well imagine what such a preparation for Mass must have meant. How well the sacrifice of the Saviour was understood by these men and women who gloried in continuing it! Two thousand years separate us from the Last Supper and from Calvary, but the Christians of the Catacombs were in much closer contact with Christ.¹

¹ See DOM CABROL, *Liturgical Prayer* and MSGR. P. BATIFFOL, *La Messe*.

Peace longed for and enjoyed at Mass.—Character and Sweetness of this Peace.—It is the Peace of God through the Possession of our Soul.—The Kiss of Peace.

We return from Mass filled with grace, calm and happy. This short pause in our daily occupations, this heart-to-heart talk with God and His Christ in the stillness of prayer and sacrifice, has restored serenity to our soul and instilled into it a most exquisite feeling of peace. Only a moment ago we were speaking of that peace enjoyed by the early Christians at Mass in the Catacombs, even while the steps of their persecutors resounded upon the roof above their heads. For two thousand years the Mass maintained and repeated this invocation to peace. The direst war ever waged recently exalted our hope and desire for peace to the highest degree. The Church petitions God for it with us. There is, however, another kind of peace which Holy Mass requests and obtains for us, it is the peace of a good conscience, a peace derived from God, the sweetness of which, says Sacred Scripture, excels every feeling. The word peace is re-

peated more than ten times during the Holy Sacrifice.

From the beginning the praises of peace are sung in the *Gloria in excelsis*, the angels' hymn on the first Christmas night. From the *Pater noster* to the *Communio* the prayer for peace grows more urgent. This is evidently a recollection of the Last Supper, when Christ poured forth His soul in the sweetness of His divine charity. It is also a relic of the primitive Church, which fought for three hundred years to obtain the right to exist and to work peacefully for the salvation of the world.

Every one has at one time or another enjoyed the sweetness of peace. With it and through it we are made happy, all our faculties are gratified, and perfect harmony is established between desire and possession. Oh, that intimate state of rest, that unreserved abandonment of one's self, that expansion of the heart, that thrill of enthusiasm, which brighten our whole being! This is peace.

Holy Church wishes us the peace of God, *pax Dei*. The peace of God is not the peace of men; it is the true peace. True peace is not that advocated by diplomats around a council board. It is far deeper than this; for it springs from the innermost part of our being, from the mysterious haunts where our thoughts are born, our desires are fanned into flame, our passions throb, and where swarms that legion of desires, ambitions, and activities among

which order and harmony must be established. Who will achieve this? Not the world; for it disturbs the peace instead of procuring it: "*Non quomodo mundus dat.*" God alone can give true peace.

Let us not imagine, however, that the peace of God is obtained by inward disturbances or that it is founded upon the ruins of nature. It would be just as correct to say that the ocean in its hours of quiet and calm no longer harbors life within its bosom. The peace of God exacts no impossible renunciations. The spiritual treatment, the moral diet required, are indicated in the Mass itself. The main prescription is to live in conformity with law and order. Do you wish to maintain peace or conquer it anew? Maintain or return to law and order. Instead of enkindling the flame of passionate desires, purify the faculties which hold the key to happiness. From the very beginning Holy Mass exhorts us, to purify the soul in order to secure that equanimity of conscience without which no peace is possible. Further on, by recalling the solution given by the Gospel to the world's riddle, it brings peace to our minds. Then, in the school of the Redeemer, we are initiated into the practice of sacrifice, without which no peace is possible. Finally, at Communion, in order to adjust or idealize all other love, God floods our heart with the greatest

love of all. Nothing can disturb this kind of peace. Since it asks more of God than of man, it is better protected from the interference of men. This peace is inexhaustible because it gushes forth from an eternal fount: *fluvius pacis*. St. Paul's most tender message to the Philippians is contained in the words: "The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ."

How many times do we hear this prayer for peace at Mass. Who has not noticed how, just before the *Agnus Dei*, the priest, holding in his fingers the consecrated Host, makes three signs of the cross with it over the chalice saying: "May the peace of the Lord be always with you!" This is the supreme wish of the Mass, the peace of the Lord, peace without further conditions, merely peace; for we may well repeat with St. Augustine that our heart is restless until it finds repose in God.

That very ancient ceremony,—“the kiss of peace,”—is the sensible manifestation of the bestowal of this gift. In the first ages of the church, down to the Middle Ages, all the faithful,—the men on one side of the church, the women on the other,—took part in this ceremony. The rite is still commemorated at High Mass when all the priests present in the sanctuary give to one another the kiss of peace. This custom may be derived from St. Paul's

exhortation: "*Salutate invicem in osculo sancto*" (Greet each other with a holy kiss) and from these words of the Gospel: "If your brother has anything against you, leave your offering before the altar and go first to be reconciled with him."

Salutation to the Altar

Let us bring these talks on the Mass to a close by considering the altar whereon the Mass is celebrated. The celebrant finds it hard to separate himself from the altar, for he exclaims: "*Circumdabo altare tuum*—I will encompass Thy altar." At the beginning he said with a heart overflowing with joy, "I will go unto the altar of God." He went unto it as a priest. We went as witnesses, as faithful believers, and this contact with the altar has thrilled with emotion all the fibres of our souls. Art has helped to make the altar an ornament for the poorest church as well as for the most majestic cathedral. Religion has done better than this. Where man, even inspired by genius, can produce only human achievements, religion has accomplished the divine. Religion has placed the relics of the martyrs in the center of the altar, to be the resting place of the Host and the Chalice, and from the burning furnace, enkindled by the words of the celebrant, bursts forth the flame which, after having consumed the heavenly Victim, spreads through the temple and revives the love of God in the hearts of all present.

O Altar of God, accept my prayer! How often, lukewarm and slumbering, has my soul gained in fervor by coming in contact with Thy divine ardors. I fancy I saw my prayer awakening, expanding, and finally soaring to Heaven amidst the clouds of incense that rose from thee. It expressed adoration, love, gratitude, resolution. Altar of God, upon thee was unfolded the whole mystery of the Mass, and with the Mass my soul ascended to the throne of God. I am a better Christian for having been near thee. At the beginning I purified my heart in order to look upon thee with greater assurance. From thee I saw the deacon descend with the book of the Gospels, the book of light and truth, and expound its lessons to the hearers. At the sacrifice, almost separated from the earth and wrapt in ecstasy, face to face with the Eternal, the celebrant upon thy table offered the Divine Victim to the Eternal Father. At the Communion, the priest proceeded from thee and from thy tabernacle, to carry the Bread of Angels to those whom Christ invited to His banquet. Altar of God, upon thee was enacted the divine drama, a repetition of the Passion, the love scene being Holy Communion, and the tragedy scene, the Consecration. Altar of God, thou art sacred to me! I leave thee with regret, filled with reverence and thrilled with love.

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